

Verbal Plunder: Combating the Feminist Encroachment on the Language of Theology and Ethics

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We are the victims of a feminist "Newspeak" that is designed not to portray or to depict reality more accurately, more graphically, or more comprehensively, but simply to meet the ideological needs of feminism and to further its own radicalized political agenda. The unabashed purpose of feminist Newspeak is, to paraphrase George Orwell, not merely to denigrate standard English, but to make the worldview of standard English impossible and, literally, unthinkable. This is done partly by coining new words, but primarily by junking old ones, or by stripping them of their old meanings. Feminist Newspeak is designed, to paraphrase Orwell again, to diminish the range of human thought and to make it impossible to formulate in one's mind what feminists misrepresent as the moral heresies and injustices of Western tradition.

You see, because thoughts and words are so intimately interconnected, when someone steals some of your words, they also steal some of your ability to formulate, or to conceive, certain thoughts. The fewer the words from which you have to choose, the fewer the thoughts it is possible for you to think and express coherently or compellingly. In the aftermath of the feminist plunder of the English language, antifeminist arguments and reasons become impossible because the words and thoughts necessary to conceive and to sustain those arguments have all been stolen. Language control is thought control. The feminist Newspeakers are trying to induce a culture-wide case of selective amnesia; they want you to forget major portions of the accumulated wisdom of many centuries of Western tradition and of the language in which it was conceived and preserved so that you will more willingly drink deep from the boiling cauldrons of cultural and theological heresy, and of feminist social revolution.

Make no mistake about it, the feminist word warriors are thought police. They will confiscate your words-and your thoughts-and they will deface those words and thoughts they leave behind. Feminist

Newspeak is not merely a form of ideological censorship, it is verbal plunder and mental vandalism.

That is my first point--the feminist word warriors have damaged English language and literature. My second point is that they have done the same thing to theology and ethics.

They've even kidnapped God himself and had him neutered. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost have been exchanged for God, Jesus, and the Spirit, as if the Son were not God, as if the revelation in Scripture could be altered at will, and as if heresy were a trifle. They had better reread Saint John and the creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon. When Christ taught his disciples to pray using the words "Our Father who art in heaven" (Matt. 6:9), he was not being an unreconstructed chauvinist simply because he wisely refrained from employing the neutered language of the New Lectionary. My point here is not merely that Jesus spoke of God as Father, but that he apparently never spoke of him as anything else and that matters.

Jesus did not merely continue the patriarchal theology of the Old Testament, he widely and deeply intensified it. In the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures, God is almost never actually addressed as 'Father.' He is described as "Father" only occasionally. But Jesus himself alone calls God "Father" more than 160 times, and except for the cry of dereliction on the cross, which is a quotation from the Old Testament, Jesus seems never to call him anything else. The feminists, in other words, are fighting with Christ, and they must be made to realize this. We not only have Christ's explicit instruction to call God "Father," we have his constant example. I remind you that no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son reveals him, and the Son has revealed him to us as Father. If you reject that revelation, then, in some profound fashion you cannot know God. If you reject that revelation, the God you know is somehow other than, and different from, the heavenly Father of Jesus. As Adolf Harnack observed, Jesus did not make God our Father, he showed us that God is Father.

Put differently, in their mad efforts to rid orthodox Trinitarianism of what they mistakenly identify as sexism, feminist theologians have junked the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and replaced them with the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer. That is, they have replaced divine ontology with function, which is a heresy. After all, it is not only the Father who creates; it is not only

the Son who redeems; and it is not only the Spirit who sustains. Each of the three divine Persons is intimately involved in each of the three functions arbitrarily singled out here by the feminists as the means of distinguishing and identifying the Persons of the Godhead. This feminist subterfuge is no more helpful than distinguishing the right fielder, the left fielder, and the center fielder as the one who runs, the one who throws, and the one who catches, respectively. But all outfielders do all things. To jettison the three Persons of the Trinity in favor of three arbitrarily selected functions of the Trinity is simply to fall into a new variation of the old Sabellian heresy of modalism, which denied that God is authoritatively revealed to us as three Persons, but which affirmed instead that God merely fulfills three functions and plays three roles. It seems to me that to be baptized into the name of the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer is to be baptized into another religion, and not into biblical or historical Christianity.

But the feminists are not only Sabellians, they are also Marcionites. That is, like Marcion, they too have utterly rejected the authoritative witness of the Hebrew Scriptures. Like Marcion, the feminists denigrate Yahweh and despise the picture he gave of himself to pious ancient Jews in the Old Testament. Furthermore, they despise the picture those pious ancient Jews have left of God for us. The feminists accuse the ancient Jews of doing--indeed, they severely criticize them for doing--precisely what they themselves unashamedly do: remake God in their own image. The feminists reject the God of the Jews because they think he is merely the culture-bound product of a political and sexist agenda. I reject the God of the feminists for precisely the same reason.

Winston Churchill is reported to have said that whatever name the Iranians choose to call their country, in English it ought to remain "Persia." Likewise, whatever tortured pronouns the feminists invent to refer to God, the good theologian will continue to call him "he."

Feminist theology, I am convinced, is a flight from biblical reality. God has made us male and female, not androgynous. God has made the male of the species not better, but head. God has revealed himself to us as he. When God became incarnated, he became a man, that is, a male. That Man is the source and model of the Christian priesthood. The sexuality of Christ is neither accidental

nor incidental. It is the result of divine choice. If you don't like it, argue with God.

In his excellent *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom pointed out that Western scholars properly criticize the loss of academic integrity among their Soviet counterparts, who seem to revise their textbooks every time a new regime comes to power. Whenever the academy capitulates to the whims of government or modern culture, Bloom says, it is the death of learning. Because theological feminism has merely baptized the gender fixation and egalitarian political agenda of the feminist left, theological feminism is the death of genuinely biblical learning. Even though it sometimes means not to be, feminist revisionism is anti-Scripture. Too many feminist theologians believe that when the church listens to the Bible the church becomes deformed, not reformed. They are wrong. The feminist theologians have yet to learn that it is far better to listen to the Heilige Geist than to the Zeitgeist, that is, to the Holy Spirit of God than to the spirit of the age.

But it is not revelation that the feminist theologians crave; it is relevance. They have not understood that all that is revelation is inescapably relevant, but that being relevant is no guarantee of being revelation. The feminist theologians have never learned that to go with the spirit of the age is to go where all ages go and have gone: out of vogue and into a well-deserved obscurity in the irretrievable past. They have never learned that to go with the God of revelation is to go where God himself goes; and God himself never goes out of date. As Vance Havner once said, God is the Eternal Contemporary. Whenever our tomorrows arrive we will always discover that God himself has been there before us.

Theological feminism is simply an accommodation to the spirit of the age, not to the core, not to the kernel, of revelation. It finds its authority in something called "feminist experience" and not in Scripture.¹

¹ Michael Bauman, "Verbal Plunder: Combating the Feminist Encroachment on the Language of Theology and Ethics," in *Pilgrim Theology: Taking the Path of Theological Discovery* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1992). Available at: <http://www.kj21.com/Related%20Matter/verbal-plunder,bauman.htm>>